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ABSTRACT

A proposed project at the Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences at the University of Tulsa would recruit and train speech-language pathologists for service to handicapped children and youth in rural settings. The project would address the shortage of speech-language pathologists in rural communities, the lack of training programs in Oklahoma, and the high cost of graduate education through three major activities: (1) recruiting 15 students who will commit themselves to at least one year of service in a rural community following their prescribed course of study; (2) training students for roles specific to rural schools and needs of rural handicapped students; and (3) placing these trained personnel in rural education systems. In addition to the skills and knowledge required of all graduates of the speech-language pathology program, project students would participate in coursework to acquaint them with rural school politics/policy, rural value systems, and various models of service delivery to rural communities. The Project Director would work closely with state department officials, rural school districts, and cooperatives to identify job openings in rural areas and assist project participants in the application process. (LFL)

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND TRAINING OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS FOR POSITIONS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

By

Jack D. Anderson, Ph.D.

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Academic Preparation and Training of Speech-Language Pathologists for Positions in Rural Schools

by

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Introduction

The Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences (CDSC), situated administratively within the College of Nursing and Applied Health Sciences, offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in Speech-Language Pathology and Deaf Education. These programs are accredited by the North Central Association, National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education, Oklahoma State Department of Education, and the National Council on Education of the Deaf. Application for accreditation by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association has been completed.

The Communicative Disorders degree programs emphasize development of the student as a professional who is trained in the knowledge and skills required for management of a variety of communicative disorders. The strong orientation to assessment and treatment of speech/language/hearing disorders assures that students will acquire the clinical skills which enable them to serve communicatively-handicapped persons of all ages and types in a variety of professional settings, including hospitals, clinics, schools, day care centers, and private practice.

Students are trained to make professional judgments, plan clinical programs, supervise other personnel, develop innovative procedures and methods, and assume total responsibility for management of clients. The Department has graduated approximately 175 students since 1970 and has placed all of its graduates in jobs shortly after graduation.

The project described herein addresses personnel needs in two areas that have been identified by the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services as having high priority for funding. One of these is the increasing need for speech-language pathologists trained to serve preschool and school-age children who possess various types of communicative impairments. The other problem is the recurring shortage of special education personnel in rural areas. Each of these documented needs is discussed here.

The need for speech-language pathologists continues to be strong. In 1980 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a need for 60,000 speech-language pathologists and audiologists by 1990. This figure represented a 40 percent increase in number of personnel available for service to the handicapped. Projected increases were recently revised downward to 29 percent, but the shortages continue to be significant, particularly in rural areas.

These projections, coupled with the steady decline in number of undergraduates choosing speech-language pathology as a career, suggests an increasing urgency to recruit and train professionals for service in communicative disorders.

A recent survey published by the Council of Graduate Programs in Communicative Sciences and Disorders (September, 1985), showed that the number of undergraduate students in the field of communicative disorders declined 16.9 percent from 1982/83 to 1983/84. Although the total number of master's degree students increased 1.0 percent during the same period, the number of master's audiology students declined by 5.7 percent and the number of master's degree hearing and speech science majors declined by 26.6 percent. The 2.6 percent increase in number of speech-language pathology master's degree students continues to be inadequate in relation to the foreseeable needs of the communicatively impaired.

Particularly alarming is the substantial decrease in undergraduate enrollment. The survey cited above indicated that 90 percent of the graduate students possessed undergraduate degrees in communication sciences and disorders at the time they entered a master's degree program. In view of these facts, one would predict a significant decrease in the number of graduate students entering the field in the next few years, contributing even further to the growing shortage of speech-language pathologists.

A particular concern is the continued documented shortage of speech-language pathologists for public school positions in Oklahoma, especially in rural areas. The Oklahoma State Department's 1984-85 Comprehensive System for Personnel Development plan indicates an immediate need for 82 additional speech-language pathologists for public school service. Most of these unfilled positions are in rural school settings.

Personnel shortages in Oklahoma confirm the findings of a Professional Self-Study Project conducted by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 1981. Meetings held in each of ten Federal Regions in the United States indicated a significant concern on the part of school personnel, clinical supervisors, and providers of clinical services relative to the substantial need for personnel to serve the communicatively handicapped in rural areas (Dr. James Lingwall, ASHA, January, 1985).

The shortages described above are exacerbated by the steady increase in the costs of graduate education. This is particularly true for private universities, including the University of Tulsa. While tuition costs have increased dramatically in all institutions of higher education in recent years, the cost at private universities is now almost four times that of public universities. These rising educational costs preclude graduate study for many students in difficult economic times. Recent estimates show that almost 70 percent of students attending private universities require federal loans and grants to meet the costs of their education (Paly, H. D., "Student aid cuts will mean small savings in U.S. tax, big hikes in state levies", Chronicle of Higher Education, April 7, 1982.)

The continued demand for the services of speech-language pathologists, the documented shortage of these professionals in rural communities, the lack of training programs in the area attacking the problem, and the relatively high cost of graduate education, combined to form the basis for this project. The specific purpose of the project is to recruit and train speech-language pathologists for service to handicapped children and youth in rural settings.

The project blends the unique with the traditional in its approach to training speech-language pathologists. It is traditional in that it meets certification requirements of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the State of Oklahoma; it is unique in that it also equips students specifically for service to rural communities through additional coursework and a workshop conducted by professionals intimately acquainted with rural attitudes, philosophy and needs. It is anticipated that the project will contribute materially to the reduction of critical and recurring shortages of special education personnel in rural school districts. The University's approach to reducing this shortage encompasses three major activities: (1) recruitment of students who will commit themselves to at least one year of service in a rural community subsequent to completion of a prescribed course of study; (2) training the students thus recruited for roles specific to rural schools and the needs of handicapped children and youth; and, (3) placement of these trained personnel in rural education systems.

The uniqueness of the training approach lies in its focus on the preparation of personnel specifically for the delivery of services to children and families who reside in rural communities. Successful delivery of such services requires a professional awareness of many issues not usually presented in traditional training programs. Community thinking and family relationships often differ widely from that of more urban communities. Clinicians unaware of rural issues often find themselves in conflict with their clients, parents and colleagues in their attempts to provide needed services. This lack of training and preparation for rural life accounts in large part for the difficulty agencies have in recruiting and retaining professional staff in nonurban communities. The intent of this project is to alleviate this problem in part through specialized training which includes a well-defined program of study in the dynamics of rural communities. The ultimate objective of the project is to place the speech-language pathologists trained through the grant program in positions that will allow them to effectively serve communicatively impaired children and youth in rural areas.

The Project

The project encompasses three major objectives, (1) recruitment of students; (2) training and education of students recruited; and, (3) placement of graduates in rural communities.

Recruitment

The goal is to recruit 15 students who will commit to eventual employment as speech-language pathologists in rural areas subsequent to completion of a prescribed course of study. Because of immediate need for professionals in rural areas, the primary objective is to identify and attract students currently majoring in speech-language pathology into an academic program that culminates in rural placement. A highly important, but secondary, recruitment objective is to identify fourth-year students and baccalaureate degreed persons in other fields of study who wish to enter the field of communicative disorders and are willing to make a committment to rural placement subsequent to completion of a master's degree in speech-language pathology.

Education and Training

The second major objective of this project is to train students for professional careers in speech-language pathology, and specifically for roles in rural areas. Students in this field of study generally are trained to fill roles in a variety of professional settings, including public and private schools, rehabilitation centers, speech and hearing clinics, hospitals, early childhood development centers, and private practice. In all of these settings, the professionally trained speech-language pathologist has major responsibility for four tasks:

1. The identification and differential diagnosis of various types of communicative disorders,
2. Prescription and implementation of therapeutic measures,
3. Evaluation of ongoing treatment and consideration of the need for interdisciplinary management and appropriate referral,
4. The development, organization and management of new speech and hearing services.

The learning experiences of our graduates are varied but are directed specifically toward developing their clinical skills. They are familiarized with the normal processes of speech and hearing through directed observation and study. They are introduced to various pathologies of communication through case demonstrations, video-tape presentations, supervised practicum and coursework dealing with specific disorders. The curriculum includes extensive practicum which is supervised by University faculty and clinic staff. Students and faculty together interact with local professional disciplines through attendance at cleft palate clinics, hospital staffings, and other habilitative events.

Skills and knowledge requisite to successful assumption of these roles are learned principally at the graduate level and are consistent with the academic standards set forth by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

In addition to the skills and knowledge required of all program graduates, this project provides participants with other information that will better prepare them for roles in rural communities. This additional educational component includes six hours of graduate coursework designed to acquaint participants with rural school politics and policy, rural value systems, and various models of service delivery to rural communities.

In order to effect a better working relationship between clinician and rural community, a variety of educational experiences for project participants is planned. These experiences include the following:

1. A course in educational leadership, SEAR 7113, Local Educational Politics and Policy. This course, currently offered by the University, focuses on the study of local school systems as political units. Three fundamental questions are raised:

    a. How are the "neighborhood" politics of the local school system similar to and different from "partisan" party politics? Time is spent examining the politics of friends, fractions, and followers.

b. What are the major "stories" told in a community about what schools do and what they should do? The notion of stories and the particular story that the schools should be "efficient and effective," are examined.

c. How does the context of the local community influence the shape of the schools? This question is examined with an eye to the participation of citizens in school affairs.

2. A three-hour graduate seminar; CDSP 7973, How To Function Effectively As A Rural Special Educator. Students will participate in a series of activities designed to enhance their understanding of the rural community as it relates to the delivery of services in their role as a speech-language pathologist.

Activity I--Under the direction of the Project Director, participants will learn how to prepare hypothetical program budgets for presentation to school administrators. Budgets will be based on manpower and equipment needs, supplies and expenses, travel allocations, and staff development costs. Where feasible, participants will present the budget proposals to rural school principals and administrators for practice.

Activity II--Under the direction of the Project Director, participants will learn how to present special needs to civic organizations to solicit their support. The major project required for this activity is the preparation and presentation of a brief proposal for a specific piece of equipment needed for physically limited children. The presentation will be prepared in written form and presented orally to other project participants. Where possible, participants will present simulated needs to local civic organizations that support the University's program in communicative disorders, e.g., Kiwanis, Sertoma Clubs, and Lion's Clubs.

Activity III--Students will participate in a miniseminar: Protocols for In-Service Training of Regular Classroom Teachers and School Administrators. Participants will be provided specific protocols for conducting in-service training sessions for community colleagues.

Activity IV--An invited guest speaker from a rural community will speak on the topic "Life in a Rural Community." A rural school administrator or member of a local civic group will serve as special speaker.

Activity V--Two-day workshop titled "Service Delivery in Rural Communities." The workshop content outlined below is presently being used by the Oklahoma State Department of Health and has proved to be successful in the preparation of Department employees for jobs in rural areas.

Day 1

I. Introductory Remarks: Philosophical Position

II. Defining RURAL

III. Assessing the Rural Community

A. History
Social
Economic
Political

B. Demographics

C. Power Structure

D. Available Resources/Referral Sources

IV. Assessing the Family Within the Rural Community

A. What is the Family?/Family Dynamics

B. A Look at Two Special Types of Families
1. Family With a Special Needs Child
2. The Abusive Family

C. Family Dynamics: Implications for Therapeutic Intervention

V. Summary and Discussion

Day 2

I. Brief Overview of Day 1/Intro to Service Delivery Issues

II. Service Delivery Models and the Law

A. Mainstreaming

B. IEPs

III. Ethical Issues in Service Delivery

IV. Job Survival

A. Fitting into the Community

B. Fitting into Your Agency

C. Miscellaneous Survival Skills

V. Summary and Discussion

The workshop will be held on the TU campus and taught by consultants from the State Departments of Health, Human Services, and Office of Special Education. It is anticipated that the Rural Community Systems workshop will be held in May 1987 and will be open first to all Department students, staff, and professionals interested in rural systems. Continuing education credit will be available to all workshop participants upon request. Fees generated through the workshop will be placed in a restricted travel fund for project students who may wish to attend other conferences related to service delivery to rural communities.

Placement of Graduates

The ultimate aim of this project of course is to place its speech-language pathology graduates in rural communities. The Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences faculty maintains a strong committment to placing graduates in good jobs. This committment has been a significant factor in achieving the Department's record of having placed all of its graduates in jobs within six months of graduation since 1970. The Project Director will work closely with State Department officials, rural school districts, and cooperatives, to identify job openings in rural areas. A list of all jobs available will be prepared and distributed to program participants and assistance provided them as needed in the application process.

Summary

The proposed project described herein blends the unique with the traditional in its approach to training speech-language pathologists. It is traditional in that it meets certification requirements of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the State of Oklahoma; it is unique in that it equips students specifically for service to rural communities through additional coursework and a workshop conducted by professionals intimately acquainted with rural attitudes, philosophy and needs. It is anticipated that the project will contribute materially to the reduction of critical and recurring shortages of special education personnel in rural school districts.